

Heritage Circle

John Goodhand has what he describes as a 'weird and wonderful' hobby. He takes photographs of pub signs. His images, some dating back to the 1960s, illustrated a fascinating talk to the Heritage Circle November meeting where he explored the meaning of pub signs and their links to local and national events in history.

Many of the oldest pubs have links to the church. *The Angel and Royal* in Grantham has a bust of the Archangel Gabriel topped by a crown. The 'royal' in its name is derived from reputed visits to the pub by three monarchs, King John, Richard III and Henry VIII.

Not all pub signs have an obvious meaning or origin. *The Tide End* at Teddington is located close to the end of the tidal range of the River Thames which accounts for its name but its sign has a picture of the little boats supporting the evacuation of Dunkirk in May 1940. Further research has found that two brothers who had a boatyard near to the pub had organised the flotilla.

A number of pub signs are humorous. *The Bulls Head* at Barnes shows a bull tossing some tea cups in the air, hinting at a bull in a china shop. Youngs pubs often have a joke in their signs.

The origins of some very well-known pubs were explained. *The Old Bull and Bush* in North Hampstead was originally a farmhouse before being bought by the artist Hogarth who developed a private house and a garden. The pub's name came from the past uses of the site.

Other pubs have sad or sinister tales behind their signs and names. *The Widow's Son* in Bow is on the site of a cottage where a poor widow lived. Her only son was a sailor and she baked him a hot cross bun each year waiting for his return. He never came home. When the pub was built, it carried on the tradition and each Good Friday a new bun is added. *The Busby Stoop* in Yorkshire stands near the site where John Busby was hanged and gibbeted for murder. Busby's ghost apparently haunts the pub.

It is sad to note that pub signs are disappearing or their images are being replaced only by words. Modern signs often lack the meaning or humour of earlier times. The speaker regretted that 'a free art gallery is being lost.'

Gerry Gurhy